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WILDLIFE SERVICES—MASSACHUSETTS

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USDA Resolves Wildlife Conflicts in Massachusetts

Every day, residents, industries, organizations, and agencies call on Massachusetts Wildlife Services (WS) for expertise in protecting agriculture, property, natural resources, and human health and safety from damage or threats posed by wildlife. Managed by professional wildlife biologists, WS responds with effective, selective, and humane strategies to resolve wildlife conflicts.

Massachusetts is a varied ecological mix of urban, suburban, and rural settings with 6 million residents. The growing wildlife population in Massachusetts increases the likelihood of conflicts arising with the public. Although Massachusetts is an urban State, agriculture is an important part of the economy. WS' professional wildlife biologists address the needs of both private and government entities experiencing wildlife damage. The program implements integrated wildlife management plans that are biologically, environmentally, and socially sound, and comply with local, State, and Federal wildlife management regulations.

WS provides agricultural assistance primarily to cranberry growers, dairy farmers, and vegetable farmers to prevent damage by Canada geese and blackbirds. The aquaculture industry in Massachusetts receives assistance from WS in preventing damage at trout hatcheries and shellfish losses to eider ducks, cormorants, gulls, swans,



and Canada geese. WS also protects drinking water supplies from bacterial contamination caused by gulls, geese, and beaver. In addition, WS protects the public by reducing public safety hazards associated with wildlife at airports. WS biologists also help to protect endangered shorebirds from predation by other birds and mammals.

Applying Science & Expertise to Wildlife Challenges

WS offers information, advice, equipment, and materials that enable many people to resolve wildlife conflicts on their own. Often, this *technical assistance* can be provided over the phone. WS also provides on-site expertise, or *direct assistance*, to manage complex wildlife problems that cannot be safely resolved by others. To support this effort, WS conducts *scientific research* across the Nation to develop answers to new problems posed by wildlife and to ensure the program benefits from the latest science and technology.

Protecting Air Travel—Wildlife strikes with airplanes cost U.S. civil aviation more than \$470 million annually and pose a hazard to flight crews, passengers, and aircraft. WS' National Wildlife Research Center (NWRC) conducts research from its Sandusky, OH field station to reduce wildlife hazards to aviation and to reduce risks to air passengers.

In Massachusetts, WS biologists provide training, wildlife hazard assessments, and direct wildlife management assistance at State airports through partnerships with airport management, State agencies, and other Federal agencies. In fiscal year (FY) 2001, WS conducted cooperative programs at two military airports and one State airport. During the same year, the program also conducted

Top 5 Major Assistance Activities:

- Protecting civilian and military passengers and aircraft from wildlife collisions
- Protecting shellfish and fish hatcheries from bird damage
- Protecting endangered and threatened shorebirds from bird and mammal predation
- Evaluating and monitoring the threat of rabies and West Nile virus
- Protecting property, natural resources, agriculture, and public health and safety from Canada Geese

Top 5 Research Projects of Interest to Massachusetts:

- Defining and reducing wildlife hazards to aviation
- Reducing blackbird damage at feedlots
- Evaluating waterfowl as disease, parasite, and noxious weed reservoirs
- Managing wildlife vectors of rabies and West Nile virus
- Reducing goose damage to agriculture, property, public health and safety, and natural resources

technical consultations at 9 civilian airports. In addition, Massachusetts WS conducts two wildlife hazard management workshops for airport personnel each year.

Protecting Human and Livestock Health—As human and wildlife populations grow, the threat of transmitting wildlife-borne diseases to humans and livestock increases. Raccoon rabies entered Massachusetts in 1992 and West Nile virus was detected for the first time in 2000. Both of these diseases present serious health risks to the public. WS has taken the lead in eradicating raccoon rabies through oral vaccination projects in several eastern States. The program is also developing protocols in conjunction with other Federal and State agencies to monitor and control the spread of West Nile virus.

Massachusetts WS conducted a program in conjunction with the University of Massachusetts Extension System to manage starling contamination of feed and water at dairy farms, which can cause salmonella infections in cattle. Cattle infected with salmonella abort their calves, slow down or stop feeding, lose weight, and reduce milk production, causing great concern to the dairy industry. Farms participating in the WS program have seen significant improvement in the quality of their cattle and milk production.

Protecting Personal Property—The Canada goose population has been increasing in Massachusetts for the past 30 years and continues to be a major wildlife problem. Seventeen percent of public requests for assistance in Massachusetts involve property damage caused by Canada geese. Many of the traditional management methods have lost their effectiveness, given the growing goose population. Massachusetts WS recommends the use of integrated wildlife damage management where several effective methods are used in combination to control goose damage. Examples include, habitat management, exclusion, harassment, and repellants. NWRC is working to develop more socially acceptable and effective management methods. Massachusetts WS specialists currently conduct integrated programs with towns and homeowner associa-



tions to prevent goose eggs from hatching. This significantly slows goose population growth.

In FY 2001, Massachusetts WS conducted 86 consultations and evaluations in order to provide recommendations on the issuance of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) depredation permits. This service was provided at no charge to the cooperators or FWS.

Looking to the Future

While WS provides the citizens of Massachusetts with safe, effective, and humane assistance for a variety of wildlife conflicts, some challenges remain. Preventing the spread of wildlife-borne diseases to humans and livestock has become a growing concern in Massachusetts. Recent threats of rabies, West Nile virus, tularemia, salmonella, giardia, and E. coli have come to the attention of public health officials.

Agricultural groups such as the Cape Cod Cranberry Association, Massachusetts Shellfish Association, and the Massachusetts Extension System have also expressed a need for more assistance to deal with wildlife damage. In addition, the U.S. Golf Course Association has expressed an interest in working more closely with WS to prevent Canada goose damage to golf courses.

Massachusetts Wildlife Services Funding • • • • •

In addition to receiving federally allocated funds, WS also receives money from cooperators; such as producers; private individuals; businesses; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies who have a vested interest in the program. In most cases, these cooperators need help to resolve wildlife damage problems or they play a role in wildlife damage management.

